



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission December 19, 2023 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the December 19, 2023 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually via Zoom. All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#) and the meeting recording has been published to [DMF's YouTube Channel](#).

Items for Future Public Hearing. DMF will proceed to public hearing with several adjustments to its regulations for 2024.

Commercial Striped Bass Rules. DMF is proposing to adjust the number and sequencing of open commercial fishing days per week by moving from three consecutive days (Mondays-Wednesdays) to two consecutive (e.g., Tuesday/Wednesday) or non-consecutive (e.g., Tuesday/Thursday) days and eliminating Monday as an open fishing day. DMF will also consider an automatic adjustment to three fishing days on August 15 based on quota availability. This is being proposed in response to recent fishery performance resulting in early-August closures of the commercial fishery in 2022 and 2023 coupled with a pending 14% reduction in the annual quota should the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved Addendum II at their January 2024 meeting. DMF is also proposing several measures relative to the primary purchase of striped bass to enhance enforcement and compliance. Potential considerations include clarifying dealers and commercial fishers both must be present at primary purchase; requiring dealers tag striped bass immediately upon purchase; and amending the definition of an open fishing day so that it no longer applies to a calendar day but a landing window (e.g., 8AM Tuesday – 7:59AM Wednesday).

Temporary Stay to Whelk Gauge Increases. DMF is proposing to stay the current schedule to increase the whelk gauge width for a period of at least three years. At present, the gauge width is to increase by 1/8" every three years until it reaches a terminal gauge size of 3 5/8" in 2023 with the next increase to occur in 2024. The proposal would push back the pending 2024 gauge increase until 2027 and continue the schedule thereafter. The purpose of this proposal is to allow for a potential Management Strategy Evaluation that would describe potential alternative management approaches.

Horseshoe Crab Conservation and Management. DMF is proposing to adopt an April 15 – June 7 closure to the harvest of horseshoe crabs to protecting spawning animals. Based on DMF's spawning survey data, this action will protect 90% of all spawning horseshoe crab activity. Additionally, DMF is considering adopting a uniform 300 horseshoe crab trip limit per calendar day for all bait fishers and complementing federal closures to horseshoe crab harvest within the Cape Cod National Seashore and the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge.

State-Waters Groundfish and May Closure. DMF reviewed the recent performance of the state waters groundfish fishery in reference to federally allocated state-waters set-asides. Additionally, DMF proposed scaling back the spatial extent of the May commercial groundfish closure in Massachusetts Bay by moving the southern boundary north from Boston to Nahant. This responds to a recent industry request to enhance spatial access to the fishery to make it more economically efficient for participants.

Commercial Mackerel Trip Limit for State Waters. DMF is proposing to adopt a state waters trip limit for Atlantic mackerel at 5,000 pounds that is then reduced to 2,500 pounds once 80% of the quota is taken. This will complement the recently enacted federal open access trip limit to enhance enforcement and compliance.

Commercial Smooth Dogfish Trip Limit. DMF is proposing to increase the smooth dogfish trip limit from 100 pounds to 300 pounds to enhance access to the available commercial quota.

Discussion Items

Interstate Fisheries Management Update. DMF briefed the MFAC on the recent joint meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). This focused on anticipated harvest reductions for summer flounder, black sea bass, and scup. For summer flounder, there will be a 28% state specific reduction; for scup there will be a 10% regional (MA-NY) reduction; and black sea bass will remain status quo. With a possible allowance for small seasonal adjustments (e.g., opening Saturday, May 18). DMF also reviewed the MAFMC's deliberations regarding commercial summer flounder net mesh rules and commercial spiny dogfish quota specifications. DMF staff also discussed the upcoming January 2024 ASMFC meeting, which focused on Addendum II to the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan.

Federal Fisheries Management Update. DMF briefed the MFAC on the December 2023 New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) meeting. The briefing covered specification packages for sea scallops, groundfish, skates, and whiting and 2024 work priorities. The January NEMFC meeting will consider recommendations to NOAA Fisheries on recreational groundfish measures and spiny dogfish specifications.

Wind Energy Update. DMF staff provided the MFAC with an update on wind energy development projects in Southern New England, fisheries compensation and mitigation programs, and the Gulf of Maine draft wind energy area.

Vessel Tracker Update. DMF gave the MFAC an update on the administration of the vessel tracker program for federal lobster trap permit holders and data collection.

Next Meeting

The MFAC will meet virtually via Zoom at 9AM on February 13, 2024.